

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, IS, EG

SUBJ: CONTINUING ISRAELI EVALUATION OF IMPORTANCE OF PASSES

1. IN RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS, IDF CHIEF OF STAFF GUR HAS TAKEN POSITION THAT QUESTION OF PASSES MUST BE SEEN IN OVERALL CONTEXT OF EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND COULD NOT BE DISCUSSED FROM PURELY MILITARY POINT OF VIEW. IN CONVERSATION WITH DATT FEBRUARY 27, GUR REITERATED THAT IT WAS NOT LINES ON MAPS THAT MATTERED, BUT THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP THAT WOULD PREVAIL AFTER ANY AGREEMENT. IF THE RELATIONSHIP IS GOOD, HE SAID, ISRAEL CAN AFFORD TO GIVE BACK A LOT OF TERRITORY. OTHERWISE ISRAEL SHOULD STAY WHERE IT IS, KEEPING THE EGYPTIAN ARMY BACKED UP AGAINST THE SUEZ CANAL. DIRECTOR OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE GAZIT HAS ALSO SAID RECENTLY IN PRIVATE THAT PASSES ARE IMPORTANT, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL, TO ISRAEL SECURITY.

2. SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT VIEW WAS TAKEN BY TRANSPORT MINISTER YAACOBI IN RECENT CONVERSATION WITH US. YAACOBI SAID HE DIDN'T AGREE WITH "SOME OF THE GENERALS" WHO ARE TAKING RELAXED VIEW ABOUT MILITARY ESSENTIALITY OF PASSES TO ISRAELI DEFENSE. YAACOBI THEN PAINTED BLEAK SCENARIO OF EGYPTIAN ARMOR POURING THROUGH DEMILITARIZED PASSES AT SOME FUTURE POINT, HALTING THEIR ADVANCE AND DARING ANYONE TO TRY TO DISLODGE THEM. HE BELIEVED THAT IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCE EXTERNAL POLITICAL PRESSURES MIGHT BE BROUGHT TO BEAR TO PREVENT ISRELI ACTION TO RESTORE STATUS QUO ANE.

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3. STILL ANOTHER FACET OF IMPORTANT OF PASSES FROM ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE EMERGED DURING FEBRUARY 26 TOUR OF SINAI BY HIGH-RANKING AMERICAN MILITARY VISITOR. VISITOR WAS TAKEN TO FOUR IDF ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE SITES WITHIN DISENGAGEMENT AREA, LARGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH IS LOCATED ON RIDGE LINE JUST NORTH OF GIDI PASS. ESCORT OFFICERS (ALL IDF INTEL PERSONNEL) POINTED OUT THAT THESE SITES CONSTITUTED REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MITLA-GIDI RIDGELINE. ISRAELIS SAID THAT MOST OF THEIR SENSORS WERE OF LINE-OF-SIGHT VARIETY, AND THAT THEIR POSITION ON HIGH GROUND PROVIDED IDF UNOBSTRUCTED CAPABILITY EXTENDING TO CAIRO AREA. SHOULD THEY HAVE TO WITHDRAW EASTWARD, LINE-OF-SIGHT CAPABILITY WOULD EXTEND ONLY TO RIDGE LINE.

4. COMMENT: VIEW OF GUR AND GAZIT THAT IDF CONTROL OF PASSES IS IMPORTANT, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL, TO ISRAELI SECURITY IS PROBABLY SHARED BY MOST IF NOT ALL OF GOI TOP LEADERSHIP. WORST-CASE PROJECTION OFFERED BY YAACOB I HOWEVER, WHILE PERHAPS NOT TYPICAL, IS NEVERTHELESS REFLECTIVE OF CONCERNS OF HARDLINERS, IN GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS IN POLITICAL OPPOSITION, AND HELPS EXPLAIN THEIR DETERMINATION TO EVACUATE PASSES ONLY IN RETURN FOR MAJOR EGYPTIAN POLITICAL CONCESSIONS. ELINT STATIONS, MOREOVER, ARE EXAMPLE OF ROUTINE TANGIBLE BENEFIT WHICH IDF CURRENTLY REALIZES FROM POSSESSION OF HIGH GROUND AROUND PASSES AND WHICH INTEL TYPES CAN BE EXPECTED TO ARGUE IS INDISPENSABLE. FOREGOING ARE REMINDERS OF THE KIND OF HARD GOING RABIN MAY HAVE IN PERSUADING SOME MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET THAT WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PASSES IS ACCEPTABLE EVEN IN RETURN FOR SUBSTANTIAL EGYPTIAN POLITICAL CONCESSIONS.

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